DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 038 094 HE 001 428

AUTHOR	Schell, Robert E.
TITLE	The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies.
SPONS AGENCY	State Univ. of New York, Oswego. Coll. at Oswego.
PUB DATE	28 Jan 70
NOTE	9p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.55
DESCRIPTORS	Behavior Patterns, Goal Orientation, *Higher Education, Performance, *Performance Criteria, Personality Assessment, *Personnel Selection, *Resident Assistants
IDENTIFIERS	*State University College at Oswego

ABSTRACT

The nature of a residence hall program depends more on the values and behavior of the resident assistants than on the principles and structure of the system. To develop a program consistent with the most salient aspects of student development, it is important to select appropriate personnel. Any selection process is based on two assumptions: (1) the difference between a successful and less successful performance can be evaluated; and (2) there are observable behaviors that can be used to predict future performance. Through job analysis, criteria of performance can be defined. Present roles of the resident assistant include administrator, advisor-counselor, community-leader, disciplinarian, and role-model. Each of these can be evaluated, so that priorities can be assigned, and decisions made concerning what abilities are most likely to predict future success, and what selection process is most likely to elicit these behaviors in some measurable way. (AF)

ED038094

"THE RESIDENT ASSISTANT AS RESPONDER TO THE SEVENTIES"

by

Robert E. Schell

State University College at Oswego

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

HE 001 428

N-X

HE

"THE RESIDENT ASSISTANT AS RESPONDER TO THE SEVENTIES"

by

Robert E. Schell

The effectiveness of any philosophy of education or system of management, no matter how logically well-conceived, is almost completely determined by the behavior of the individuals who are responsbile for its implementation. The "Philosophy of Residence Living" and the "Response to the '70's" provide the residence hall staff with both the principles and structure necessary to develop a program that is consistent with the most salient comcepts of student growth and development. If logical systems were enough to determine the long-term nature of the residence hall program, then the future would be assured and patience would be the Student Affairs Division's greatest virtue. However, it is certain that the system will be quite different in practice than in theory and that virtues other than patience will be required of the professional staff. Each member of the residence hall staff, Directors and Resident Assistants, will contribute to the success or failure of the present objectives and management system through his own interpretation of the system, his personality, and behavior. While some modification of the individual's perception of the management system and its implementation is possible through orientation and in-service training programs, little success will be realized by using methods to modify personality structures or behavior patterns. Here the residence hall staff must depend upon a selection process to find those applicants most capable of implementing the "Response to the '70's". The selection process must pass those applicants whose value structures and behavior patterns are congruent with the Division's patterns and reject those who are incongruent.

The selection process for the position of Resident Assistant is essential to the successful implementation of the "Response to the '70's". Both on paper and in practice the majority of staff contacts with students and decisions effecting students are made by the Resident Assistant. One has only to read the "Waggoner Report" on the role of the Resident Assistant to achieve a grasp of the incredible responsibilities of the position and the high performance standards expected.

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

While no one can deny the role to be played by a central office staff or the Residence Hall Directors, it should be clear to even the casual reader of the "Waggoner Report" that the "Response to the'70's" will depend largely upon the responses of the Resident Assistants, individually and collectively.

Essentially a personnel selection process is nothing more than a means of identifying that proportion of a group of applicants who will perform their assigned tasks most adequately. In order to design such a selection system it is necessary to define the tasks to be performed to develop a means of reliably assessing the performance of those tasks, and to infer which abilities or combination of abilities predict most efficiently the adequacy of future performance. The problem can then be further reduced to a system of observations of applicant behavior in order to assess the extent to which each applicant possesses the critical abilities.

In industry the problem is often solved in this manner. The tasks to be performed by an individual holding position X are analyzed by an industrial engineer or psychologist, by observing the individual at work, by reading the materials used in the training of the individual, and by consulting with his supervisors. Following this analysis, hypotheses are developed concerning behaviors and abilities which logically should predict adequate job performance. Tests are then found which reliably measure each of the hypothesized abilities. These tests may include psychological tests (eg. intelligence, mechanical ability, clerical ability, etc.), interviews, standardized application forms, or any of the myriad of techniques available. The only common feature is that the results of each can be quantified in some reliable way. Then one of two courses is followed.

These tests are administered to applicants who are hired without regard to the results of the tests or they are administered to workers who are already working at job X.

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

In the first instance, after suitable training and time to adjust to the new position, the workers are evaluated in terms of the tasks they must perform. This performance evaluation is usually quantifiable as well and may be in terms of output, sales, or supervisor's ratings. The results of the selection tests are then correlated with job performance so that one test alone or several in combination predict the performance assessments for workers already in job X. The efficiency of the final battery of selection procedures can be stated in the form of the ratio between the proportion of successful applicants hired after the use of a selection process to the proportion of successful applicants hired before the implementation of the selection process. The larger this ratio, the more efficient is the selection process. A final step is to implement the process and to carefully evaluate the results in such ways as training cost per successful worker, job turnover, or worker out-put. As might be inferred from this description, the process will not be perfect, but should improve selection over chance.

Any selection process for Resident Assistants is based on the assumption that the staff or at least some individual can differentiate in some communicable way between a successful and less successful performance. If thereis no way of determining the degree of competency exhibited by a Resident Assistant, then there is no point in a selection process other than to provide some kind of initiation rite (which may, by the way, have some merit). If it cannot be determined when the job is being done well, then any attempt to predict job success is doomed to failure. It has been said that, "One road is as good as any other to a traveler who does not know where he is going". In other words it is hard to find applicants with potential if the nature of performance is unknown.

The selection process is further based on the assumption that there are observable behaviors that can be used to predict future Resident Assistant performance.

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

It is quite likely that this assumption can be met, if adequate performance is defined in behavioral terms. As an example, if one of the performance criteria for the Resident Assistant is punctuality in the performance of duties, then a simple record of punctuality during the selection process could be kept, later quantified, and tested as a predictor. It is reasonable to assume that predictors, with some degree of validity, can be found for almost any behavioral criteria.

The problem facing the staff seems then to be one of defining the criteria of performance for Resident Assistants. There are at least two ways of defining these criteria. It would be possible to ask Directors to rank their staff in the order of most effective to least effective individuals, and then to determine the variables that serve to differentiate the top ten percent from the bottom ten percent. The advantages of this approach are that it eliminates the need to analyze the job fully and eliminates the need to verbalize intuitive, nebulous insights held about the position. Its disadvantages are that it fails to take into account the different expectations of Directors and the priorities they individually hold, the fact that it is easier to differentiate between extremes than it is to make subtle differentiations near the middle of the list, and the fact that such ratings reflect only the present, diffuse status of the Resident Assistant's role.

A second, more satisfying approach seems to be that of job analysis. Its advantages are that analysis permits the development of a job description compatible with any system and, if desired, different from the status quo, it reduces the subjective aspects of rating systems, and it more specifically defines the expectations held providing a more reliable measure of the degree of competence. It is essential to note that even an excellent job analysis does not provide a completely objective system, but it does help to reduce subjectivity.

In general, I would propose that the Resident Assistant's present functions can be

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

broken into five, mutually exhaustive, but not necessarily exclusive sub-functions. Different Directors and/or different management systems might place them in various orders of priority, but probably would not change the basic categories.

Administrator. In this role the Resident Assistant serves as a communications link between the student body and higher levels of administration. In preparing reports, room inspection sheets, and confirming certified lists, he is communicating upwards on the state of his floor. He should also communicate less tangible, but perhaps more important observations about the needs and perceptions of students. He is also responsible for communicating and, at times, interpreting policies, rules, and regulations made at higher administrative levels. His success at meeting the demands of the administrative role is probably related to the degree of congruence between his and the institutions value structure, his ability to understand communications received and to communicate understandably to others, and his ability to be sensitive to the needs, perceptions, and thoughts of a larger proportion of his students. His success could be assessed by measuring the amount of cognitive understanding of policy shown by his residents, the form and accuracy of his reports, and the depth of understanding and sensitivity he demonstrates in interpreting his residents to others.

Advisor-counselor. In this role the Resident Assistant deals with his students as individuals. He helps them to deal with lower-level educational or personal-social problems and makes appropriate referrals. Success in this function is determined by the Resident Assistant's ability to establish a rapport with individuals and to inspire trust and confidence. Measures of the degree of competence might be the number of referrals made by each Resident Assistant, perceptions of students in terms of whom they would go to when faced with a problem, or the concerns expressed by Resident Assistants in personal interviews or reports.

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

Community-leader. This role is somewhat analogous to the adviser-counselor role defined above, but in this instance the Resident Assistant is responsible for developing warm, open, supportive relations within the total group. It might be defined as his success in developing a sense of community among residents. The abilities required for success in this area might include his ability to function in democratic, rather than authoritarian ways, his political astuteness, and his trust in the integrity of the group. Assessment in this area might include an assessment of group-developed rather than individually-developed activities, sociometic assessment of the floor, and an assessment of the means by which he chooses to solve collective problems.

Disciplinarian. These are the "policeman" functions so often mentioned in staff meetings. In general, this role can be expressed in terms of the Resident Assistant's responsibility to control the activities of the residents on his floor so as to protect the rights of each individual and to enforce the rules and regulations of the residence hall. This depends upon his ability to see reality and to take firm, but fair action. This might be evaluated in terms of the resident's perceptions of noise levels, amount of damage on the floor, the resident's perceptions of the fairness of disciplinary action, or an analysis of the reasons given by students when requesting moves from the floor.

Role-model. This is the final and most difficult of all roles to define. In a sense it refers to the charisma generated by the Resident Assistant and is related to the way in which people are drawn and relate to him. It might best be defined as his ability to inspire others to be like him and to adopt a style of behavior like his. It is probably related to the quality of his self-concept, his general attitudinal set, and his perception of others. It might have some relation to the degree to which he is congruent with the "fully-functioning person" in the Rogerian sense or the "self-actualizing person" in the Maslovian sense. It might be assessed

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

in terms of the number of his students who apply for the position of Resident Assistant or by sociometric measures which would indicate his position within the group's hierarchy.

While each Director and each system of management will assign different priorities and values to each of these roles, it is in this area that the search for the selection protocol must take place. As soon as the staff knows what it is looking for it can implement a procedure that has some promise of success. There is no value of falling into the trap demonstrated by the old story about the drunk on his hands and knees looking for something on a street corner under the light. When asked what he had lost and where, he replied a quarter, up the block, but that he was looking here because the light was better. It is just as ridiculous to search for Resident Assistants with some kind of selection process, because it is easier.

In order to be effective, the residence hall staff must ask:

1. What criteria serve to differentiate between the successful and the less successful Resident Assistant? (The five dimensions, disciplinary, advisory-counseling, administrative, role-mode, and community-leader is one way of analyzing the postition.)

2. What abilities or observable behaviors are most likely to predict future success?

3. What selection process is most likely to elicit these behaviors in some measurable way?

The order of these questions cannot be changed. The process must be based on the search for the most effective Resident Assistant. It is not enough to have only congruence between the Director and the applicant.

The requirement is that the Directors examine the present Resident Assistants now in light of the "Philosophy for Residence Living" and "Response to the '70's" and to determine the characteristics of the successful Resident Assistant. No detective story can reach a conclusion until all the clues have been examined and the

The Resident Assistant as Responder to the Seventies, cont'd.

criminal identified. Logic and a few shrewd guesses can lead to a criminal or, in this case, the Resident Assistant who will be Oswego's "response to the seventies."